DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 314 UD 021 198

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TITLE Accommodating Black Students on Traditionally White Campuses: Some Considerations.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); *Admission Criteria; Black Stereotypes; *Black Students; College Entrance Examinations; *Counseling; Counseling Techniques; Counselor Attitudes; *Counselor Client Relationship; Higher Education; Secondary Education; Student College Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper concerns the need for colleges to accommodate black students, especially in the area of guidance. The use of standardized tests and other means for predicting the academic success of blacks is discussed. It is suggested that admission personnel include such variables as self concept, leadership potential, ambition, and maturity as means of predicting academic success. The role of stereotypes and the interaction between black students and white counselors are considered in relation to the black student's reaction to counseling. It is said that counselors' use of such terms as "culturally deprived" and "disadvantaged" tend to characterize black students as being inferior. It is recommended that counselors of black college students have an understanding of black culture, but that they understand that not all blacks share the same subcultural traits and attitudes. (APM)

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JAN 5 - 1981

ED199314

Counseling and Guidance 795

A Seminar In Counseling

ACCOMMODATING BLACK STUDENTS ON TRADITIONALLY WHITE CAMPUSES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

by

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Generally, historians and educators recognize the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. as the focal point which enhanced the visibility of blacks on traditionally white campuses. This period is also associated with the uncovering of deepseated problems brewing in the desegregation process caused by the inability of many blacks to make a smooth transition from the Afro-American culture to the culture predominant at white institutions. Until this time, universities had merely placed emphasis on recruiting the best black applicants and providing academic oriented summer sessions. Little attention had been accorded affective development instrumental in the growth of the "whole person." It was assumed that these students should be grateful for the opportunity to live and learn in the environment of the dominant culture. This gross miscalculation carried the assumption that black students would make the needed adjustments while the institutions continued on in traditional mode. The newly implanted minority subculture was not recognized as a distinct entity requiring attention on traditionally white campuses.

The assassination of King brought to fruition the undercurrent of discontent fermenting among black students and ended a period of benign neglect. Black students staged demonstrations and barricaded themselves in administration buildings across the country with demands for equal treatment. "These confrontations . . . were inevitable because the Black students were no longer

content with just getting an education. Instead, they also wanted to be part and parcel of college life--politically, economically and socially (Britt 1975, p. 12). The accommodation of black students reached the top of the lists for many administrations. Institutions responded to varying demands from special admissions and quotas to the hiring of black faculty and the establishment of Black Studies Programs.

Amidst the oftentimes horrid protest, the total mechanism on many campuses underwent a facelift to appease black students. Included among the many areas of activity were student services, especially, counseling which was commissioned to develop sensitivities towards the distinct minority experience.

Much has been written in the past decade regarding higher education and the special needs of black students. Emphasis has ranged from methods of assessing ability to models for counseling the culturally different. Suggestions have been made on every conceivable measure believed necessary to make the academic environment less threatening and the stay both comfortable and lasting. Though the ever present need for financial aid appears for the moment to be satisfied by grants and insured loans from the federal government, concerns involving proper assessment of abilities, retention, and special counseling remain very much current.

Many institutions have resisted innovative change to accommodate the "new student." However, upon an historical

observation of higher education in the U.S., one sees a very flexible trend designed to meet the needs of those requiring special attention. The philosophy which spun the land grant institutions back in 1862 encompassed the needs of an agricultural community which was far from being an academic elite. The same is true of the adult education curriculum of the 1920's which was used to help the newly arrived immigrants adapt to American life and become productive citizens. Likewise, the veterans upon returning from the world wars thrust upon higher education an assortment of basic skills deficiencies. Even today, foreign students are admitted to American universities with various language handicaps and adjustment problems. This country has a history of serving groups with poor basic skills who are not unlike many of the black students today. When viewed historically, the defiant cry against the lowering of standards appears less significant. Chavis and Cash (1971, p. 27) wrote:

> It is not a sign of inferiority to have been denied a quality education. It is a sign of quality education, however, to challenge students and meet their educational needs.

Nonetheless, many black students felt pressured to justify their presence. In fact, one author was moved to write:

> Race is an issue on predominantly white campuses. At most (if not all) such colleges many whites believe that blacks were admitted to colleges and universities only through special programs. Where there is more than a token number in medical, dental, and law schools that perception is heightened (Watson 1979, p. 28).

In light of the history of higher education in the U.S., no justification is needed.

One controversy which has spanned the past decade entails the adequacy or inadequacy of conventional means to predict the academic success of blacks. Many studies have been done on this subject with conclusions supporting both claims. Sedlacek (1974) in his research found that there had never been an adequate study of the issue. He concluded that the same basic methodology was used in all studies; "sample a group of intact Blacks at one or more institutions, correlate their college grades with SAT or ACT scores and high school grades and reach a conclusion." The mistake of this method is that a relatively homogeneous group is sampled which is not representative of the blacks capable of doing college work. Whiting (1969, p. 230) remarked in a speech back in 1968:

> Consequently, a number of institutions tend to recruit only those deprived students with conventionally measured academic promise. It is clear, however, that a genuine acceptance of responsibility requires a commitment to delve into the core of the problem and, therefore, should result in open recruiting and enrolling of "risk" candidates among disadvantaged high school graduates.

This pattern of thought is carried a step further by Sedlacek (1974, p. 514) who concluded that "there are likely many Blacks beyond that group who need and indeed deserve higher education but their culture, background and lifestyles are different than what we typically measure with our predictors and criteria."

The present writer views favorably the study conducted by Trachtman (1975) which concluded that reading and math scores correlated substantially with academic performance, however; these scores proved inefficient as "sole" predictors of minority student performance. Presently, research is underway at the Cultural Study Center at the University of Maryland geared to find out if there is anything measurable in the black experience which can be translated into practical terms.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Sedlacek (1978) on the admission and retention of minority students in large universities, he concluded that special admissions standards are becoming more stringent. In the 110 major universities surveyed, he found that black enrollment peaked in 1973 at 6% but had fallen to 5% in 1976. This is believed to have been caused by the admissions criteria used. It was also found that of the 4% or 5% new black freshmen, only 2.5% returned to public schools while, of the 6% or 7% at private schools, 6.3% returned. The study concluded that the programs at private schools have much more success with black students than those of public schools.

There are no easy solutions to the problem of predicting academic success among minority groups. However, much can be done to insure an attitude groomed with a positive outlook. In this area the secondary school system has failed black students. In outlining the obligations of higher education to "educationally disadvantaged" youth, Whiting (1969) petitioned colleges to

formulate effective teaching and curricular patterns to deal with black students. The response has not been encouraging; nonetheless, traditionally white institutions are basically ill prepared to inflate egos, in many cases, deflated by inattention for many years. Until proper attention is given to the under-preparedness of blacks, as well as, other minorities on the primary and secondary levels, admissions personnel should support conventional methods of predicting success along with non-traditional criteria. This criteria could include a combination of variables such as self-concept, leadership potential, personal maturity, and ambition.

One variable highly influential in the retention and ultimate success of black students in higher education is effective counseling services. Since black students' admission to traditional white campuses in quantity, this has remained a sensitive area. It was early thought that blacks would respond in the typical mode of their white counterparts. Consequently, barriers caused by their subcultural experience in America often baffled white counselors who were unaware of the different mannerisms and customary modes of expression. This problem in communication is a current one.

Much has been written in the past decade regarding the reaction of blacks to counseling. One area of discussion which threads the tide of research is the "stereotype." Part of these judgemental errors result from improper definition or

categorization of black students. The terms culturally deprived, educationally deprived, underprivileged, and disadvantaged can easily characterize black students as somehow being on an inferior plane as people. The insinuation resounding from much of this terminology fails to accord proper respect to the richness of the black subculture. In fact, the measuring stick used in this categorization is based on values and customs held by the dominant culture. If a native from France comes here to study, he or she will probably be at a disadvantage culturally but will not be categorized "disadvantaged." One writer contended that "the lop-sided emphasis on real and imagined deficits has resulted in de-humanization of Black clients. It has tended to portray the Black client as a "deficient white client" (Smith 1977, p. 391). The term "culturally different" appears more appropriate and less controversial. Though "disadvantaged" is used widely in education and government, there are those who believe this term to be "an alibi for the inequality of the socio-economic system and racism" (Smith 1977, p. 391).

Another problem with such terms is that they have become synonymous with certain ethnic groups or colors rather than economic classes. This could create difficulty for those who consider themselves "middle-class" members of the designated group and feel not in the least bit deprived. By the same token, many whites who are deprived economically receive less focus because, due to color, they are categorized "advantaged."

Overwhelmingly, research in this area suggested that each student be treated as an individual.

Besides the problem of stereotypes is the concern for the establishment of rapport during counseling sessions, especially between black students and white counselors. Sue (1977, p. 423) suggested that the counselor must have knowledge of the minority group cultures and experiences to effectively relate during sessions. In fact, self disclosure is believed to be based on the degree to which the counselor appears to have commonality with the client (Vontress 1970). It is further suggested by Sue (1977, p. 424) that "counseling individuals from different cultures dictates not the same approach but a differential one consistent with lifestyles." The more the counselor is aware of the mannerisms and modes of expressions used by black students, the better he or she is able to facilitate the counseling process.

One study found that there are at least two subcultures among black students having distinct characteristics which could be important in assessing the reaction of black students to university counseling centers. One group, the "middle-class aspiring," tended to be less conscious of discrimination, less suspicious of faculty and administrators, and more enthusiastic about the favorable aspects of college. They tended, however, to be dissatisfied with social activities. The other group openly rejected white administrators, faculty and students.

They viewed the college experience with disfavor and reported more instances of racial conflict. Wilson (1974, p. 129) concluded that "traditionally blacks have been lumped together out of their commonality and particular situation." "Commonality," that is, race, does not necessarily mean "sameness." Any counseling approach should consider strongly the subcultural effects upon the client's perception of the environment.

Another area of discussion evolves around the belief that black students can only be effectively counseled by black counselors. There may be some validity to this contention, in that, a similar frame of reference is present due to ethnic background. However, the lack of communication invariably present in the black-white dyad is based, in many cases, on distrust and misperception on the part of both. One study by Cimbolic (1973) found that black subjects were more than willing to return to an effective white counselor. Wright (1975) in studying the response of black and white students to counseling sessions conducted by black and white counselors found race to be insignificant in regards to affection, respect, freedom from threat, acceptance of another's personality, and recognition of another's feelings. There are barriers to be crossed on both sides and these two studies are indications of a movement towards some form of reason.

The present writer is against any stigmatization of counselors and clients into categories based on race. A black counselor should not feel that his or her aim is to mainly

counsel black students. A good student counselor should be able to counsel all students. America is a multiracial society which dictates a need for interaction which can bring about understanding and develop sensitivities regarding all ethnic groups. Black students need exposure to all areas of student development so that their focus will reflect a realistic view of the world.

The accommodation of the black entity by institutions of higher education continues to be an ongoing process. Obviously, there are many concerns which register in the minds of the students, as well as, university personnel. The history of American higher education reflects a pattern of adaptability to serve those in need. This tradition must be forwarded in an atmosphere of understanding which will trigger overall accomplishment for society. As people in human services, counselors and other student personnel workers must work to alleviate all barriers to a wholesome educational process.

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